



ព្រះរាជាណាចក្រកម្ពុជា

Kingdom of Cambodia

ទីស្តីការគណៈរដ្ឋមន្ត្រី

Office of the Council of Ministers

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KEY REMARKS

by

H.E. Mr. SOK An

**Deputy Prime Minister, Minister in Charge of the Office of
the Council of Ministers,**

**At the Opening of the Second National Conference on
"The Preservation and Development of Khmer Culture and Art"
22 October 2004**

- Samdech, Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**
- Distinguished Guests**

Today, I have the great honour to participate in the opening of the Second National Conference on the Conservation and Development of Khmer Culture-Art. Today's conference is the second joint effort made by the Institute of Culture and Fine Arts of the Royal Academy of Cambodia, the Royal University of Fine Arts and the Royal University of Phnom Penh, which truly reflects the fact that Cambodian society continues to pay a very strong attention to its culture. On behalf of the Royal Government of Cambodia and my own behalf, I would like to express my deep appreciation the three institutions for co-hosting such an important event.

It is widely known that we have inherited a wealth of invaluable cultural heritage from our ancestors. The cultural heritage can be classified into two categories: First, "Physical Culture" which includes temples, historical buildings, sculptures, paintings, musical instruments, stone scripts, letters and countless other artifacts. The second type of cultural heritage is "Spiritual Culture" which comprises philosophy, morals, ideals, conscience, knowledge, know-how, dances and songs, etc.

History shows that Cambodia's culture is one of the oldest in South-East Asia. Our Khmer scholars have claimed that although Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in the world, it is a billionaire in terms of cultural wealth. Overwhelmingly it is exposure to our

culture that the world comes to know and to pay attention to Cambodia. We have to make a maximum use of our great cultural wealth to increase our national income. This can be done via the mass media and publishing or, more directly, via foreign tourists who visit our country. Some countries in our region are able to attract millions of tourists and pocket billions of dollars into their economy. With the great cultural treasures that Cambodia has to offer. I strongly believe that Cambodia can learn from those experiences and bring ever more foreign tourists here.

Samdech, Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests,

I would like to draw the attention of the conference to the fact that culture represents a nation's spirit, and, hence, is an integral part of national identity. We, the people of Cambodia, from our own bitter experience know that if culture is lost, then loss of identity will surely follow despite continued survival of one's people and land. On the contrary, there are some peoples in the world whose lands have been lost but their cultures have remained alive and continue to thrive. In this regard, the question arises: *how have those cultures been preserved?*

There are possibly many answers. But, experience shows that national unity an education offered to children in understanding and love for their own culture. In this way, they have preserved and developed their cultures wisely and sustainably. Thus, Cambodia should follow this model.

I would also like the conference to focus on the words "Preservation and Development of Khmer Culture-Art". This means as follows:

1. We have to learn, understand, research, and define what is "heritage and identity of Khmer Culture and Art" and also classify preservation needs.
2. We have to be innovative and creative in order to meet the demands of Cambodian people at the present and in the future. However, such innovation and new creation must have its roots in original Khmer culture so that our Khmer identity remains intact.
3. We have to find strategies to cope with the negative effects of globalisation of cultures, which seriously affects Khmer society.
4. We have to be brave enough to accept the positive sides of foreign cultures in order to complement where Cambodian culture. We must recognise that any culture in the world, in small or big nations, cannot be perfect, and, will thus, always have some deficiencies. Therefore, the cross-cultural influence is an unpreventable phenomenon. Please bear in mind that culture-rich Cambodia in previous time was influenced by foreign cultures, namely from India and France. We all know no single individual can understand everything in this world, a world full of uncountable great knowledge. Because human need is unlimited, each individual has to be necessarily inter-dependent as so do individual cultures.

In summary, we must not discriminate against foreign culture, but neither do we have to accept the negative parts of foreign culture which have infiltrated into ours.

Again, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the conference-organising commission and the three institutions, particularly the Institute of Culture and Fine Art of the Royal Academy of Cambodia, for their initiatives in shaping this conference. I also wish the conference an enthusiastic and fruitful discussion, which I hope will lead to determining a national vision for our common goal of sustainable "Preservation and Development of Khmer Culture and Art".

Finally, thank you for your kind attention and I wish Samdech, Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, and distinguished guests happiness and prosperity.

I declare the conference open.

THANK YOU.